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Transregional Threats and Maritime Security Cooperation

Center for Naval Analyses
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On 31 July 2017 CNA conducted an internal workshop of experts to discuss the implications of the 4+1 challenges on maritime security cooperation (MSC). The outcome of this workshop fed directly into one of several background briefings to be delivered to the 2017 Maritime Security Cooperation Working Group, which carries the theme of transregional challenges and best practices in planning and executing MSC.

This volume contains five short essays that served as a basis for that discussion and which will help in outlining the major issues surrounding each of the 4+1 challenges and their implications for MSC. The essays are not research based; nor are they comprehensive treatments of the issues. Rather, each is designed to prompt thought and discussion about the role of U.S. MSC in the context of the 4+1 framework.

China

By Thomas Bickford, CNA China Studies

The maritime domain has become increasingly important to Beijing's economic, political, and security interests. At its 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the Chinese Communist Party adopted the goal of transforming China into a "strong maritime country." In 2013, President Xi Jinping announced the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," an ambitious Chinese-led proposal to increase investment and promote economic collaboration along land and sea routes from China through the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean to Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. In 2015, the People's Liberation Army publically announced a new naval strategy that transitions the PLA Navy from a regional to a globally deployable force.

Beijing has been investing, and will likely continue to invest, in developing its naval and maritime law enforcement forces, expanding their capabilities and tasking. One aspect of this effort is increasing MSC. China's maritime security plans present the U.S. Navy with both challenges and opportunities.

- An increase in the capability of Chinese maritime forces may increase pressure on U.S. MSC partners in East Asia, with implications for U.S. programs with those countries.

- China's own maritime security cooperation efforts may, in some cases, compete with or undermine U.S. Navy MSC programs.

- However, the United States and China also share many common maritime security concerns, which means that there will continue to be opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

China and maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas

The East and South China Seas continue to be areas of friction between the United States and China. China has longstanding territorial claims to Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands (disputes with Japan and Taiwan), the Paracel Islands (disputes with Vietnam and Taiwan), and the Spratly Islands (disputes with Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Taiwan). In addition, China continues to challenge freedom of navigation of military vessels and continues to challenge U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea.

At present, the China Coast Guard's ships take the lead in supporting Chinese claims to disputed maritime areas with PLA Navy vessels typically providing overwatch. Chinese maritime law enforcement forces and their actions pose two major challenges. First, their growing capabilities and potential activities present the United States and its regional allies and partners with a significant security challenge in the grey zone.

Second, the qualitative and quantitative gaps between China's coast guard (and its navy) and those of U.S. maritime security partners in Southeast Asia continue to grow. As of 2015, China's coast guard had 205 ships, more than the combined coast guards of Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Publically available data indicate that gaps between China's maritime law enforcement forces and those of other countries in the region are likely to increase, undermining the efficacy of U.S. efforts to build partner capacity. This may undermine confidence in the United States and its ability to support its partners. It may also provide China with greater leverage to persuade other claimants to reconsider their approaches to China in the South China Sea.

China and maritime security cooperation

While Chinese maritime forces pose potential threats in the East and South China Seas, China is also engaged in maritime security cooperation:

- The U.S. Coast Guard has a longstanding relationship with its Chinese counterpart. China Coast Guard officers have been riding on U.S. ships enforcing deep sea drift-net fishing violations in the Gulf of Alaska and other locations for several years.

- The Chinese navy has maintained a continuous anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008. China has repeatedly stated its willingness to work with others and conduct more operations in areas such as the Gulf of Guinea if needed.

- China has identified HA/DR as an important task for its naval forces and participates in ASEAN's ADDM HA/DR exercises. The PLA is interested in expanding cooperation with the United States on HA/DR, and the ground forces of the two countries now conduct annual combined HA/DR exercises.

- In early 2017, the Philippine government raised the possibility of China assisting the Philippines in maritime security.

- China has maritime security initiatives with Malaysia and Indonesia.

On the one hand, the United States and China share many common maritime security concerns. Both countries see a need to protect sea lines of communication on which both economies depend. Both countries are concerned with non-traditional security threats such as piracy, terrorism at sea, and natural disasters. Cur-

rent military relations and USCG-CCG relations provide a basis for enhanced bilateral cooperation on issues of mutual concern in the future.

On the other hand, as China increases its own maritime security cooperation efforts with other countries, China could also emerge as a competitor with the United States as a partner of choice for maritime security cooperation. China may be able to leverage its own MSC programs to undermine or counter U.S. efforts to shape the region.

Maritime security and China's proposed "One Belt, One Road Initiative"

Finally, it should be noted that as China advances its maritime silk road concept, it will likely also expand the extent of its maritime security cooperation activities. In June 2017, China's National Development and Reform Commission and its State Oceanic Administration jointly issued a "Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative." The document provides important insights into Beijing's goals and aspirations for the maritime dimensions of the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative, including maritime security. Possible future maritime security cooperation activities mentioned in the document include:

- Joint or cooperative development of ocean monitoring services

- Assisting developing countries along the maritime silk road in developing their own maritime security capabilities

- Signing joint or cooperative agreements on search and rescue missions and emergencies at sea

- Signing cooperative agreements on training and information sharing

- Strengthening cooperation on maritime law enforcement.

It should be noted that the "Vision" document is a statement of what China is willing to pursue. What agreements will actually emerge will depend on the receptivity of other countries to Chinese initiatives. Consequently, the USN should pay close attention to how its partners are responding to Beijing's initiatives.

It should also be noted that the "Visions" document encompasses the entire proposed maritime silk road and, therefore, indicates that China may be seeking to expand cooperation on maritime security to a wide range of countries in the Indian Ocean Region, Africa, and Europe. Moreover, the document references maritime law enforcement forces, which suggests that, in the future, the China Coast Guard, together with China's other maritime forces, may be operating far from home, not just in the East and South China Seas.

Russia

By Dmitry Gorenburg, CNA Russia Studies Program

Russia is interested in MSC, but on its own terms. When relations with Western countries were better, it participated in a large number of international maritime security forums and exercises, and even joined in a number of multinational security operations. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Russian naval commanders and political leaders saw benefits from maritime cooperation. As the then commander of the Baltic Fleet,

Admiral Yegorov, told a visiting group from CNA back in November 1995, "The Russian Navy prospers when Russia is interacting cooperatively with the rest of the world."

During this period, maritime security cooperation was the most highly developed in the smaller fleets. Both the Black Sea Fleet and the Baltic Fleet participated in a number of international maritime security events. BlackSeaFor, for example, not only provided the Russian Navy with an opportunity to improve its skills and extend collaboration with neighboring navies, but also was seen as a means of showing others that it could act as a responsible neighbor that was ready to direct multi-national military operations in the region should the need arise. Russian commanders argued that this activity improved stability and peace in the region, reducing the potential for unwanted intervention by outside forces. They also argued that participation in such multinational operations as Active Endeavor, BlackSeaFor, and Black Sea Harmony created a positive environment for Russian security and economic activity in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, while participation in BaltOps and Open Spirit had the same effect in the Baltic region. In addition to the practical training and political value, the Russian Navy valued the status provided by its participation in NATO operations such as Active Endeavor. It was also an active participant for many years in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

From 2003 to 2013, Russia participated in the annual FRUKUS naval exercise with the United States, UK, and France. This exercise was intended to accustom Russian naval planners to working with NATO navies and to encourage maritime cooperation and partnership. It was suspended and then canceled in the aftermath of Russia's intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. Russia also participated in RIMPAC, as an observer in 2010 and as a full participant in 2012. It was expected to participate again in 2014, but this was also canceled in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis.

The Russian Navy still sees the participation of Russian naval ships in exercises and operations with foreign navies not only as a way to improve naval interoperability, but also as a means for improving interstate relations. However, it now participates almost exclusively in bilateral exercises and naval activities, rather than being involved in multi-national security forums and events. Its primary partner in this regard is China, though it also works on occasion with India and with states in Southeast Asia and Latin America. It works with the latter more for the purpose of promoting its arms sales agenda than for security cooperation in and of itself.

Russia's MSC efforts

Russia is not focused on selling MSC in the sense that the United States is. It is not interested in MSC for the sake of improving regional security or developing international cooperation. It is interested in MSC for the sake of promoting its security interests and for the sake of developing bilateral relationships with potential security partners or arms sale clients. It has focused on certain countries and regions, including China, India, Southeast Asia, Latin American countries ruled by leftist governments (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba), and the Middle East and North Africa. A second goal for Russian MSC is to increase access to ports in key locations. This is a particular need in the Mediterranean, where it needs port access in order to maintain its naval presence. Russia has long sought to increase security cooperation with potential basing sites, such as Egypt and Cyprus; at some point, it even tried to attract NATO members such as Greece and Turkey.

In other words, Russia is a competitor to U.S. MSC efforts only in a few select "markets." India may be the most strategically significant of these, though Egypt comes close and Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia may be at play as well. Elsewhere, it seeks to engage in cooperation with countries that do not have security relations with the United States (China, Cuba, Venezuela, Syria).

Russia as a global MSC rival

Russia does not have a major impact on U.S. MSC efforts with its most important allies (NATO states, Japan, South Korea, Australia). Its impact is significant, however, among countries that are on the margins of the U.S. alliance system. India has long been a military partner for Russia, and Russia has sought to retain this relationship even as India has worked to diversify its military relations to include the United States and its NATO allies. Russia has maintained a robust series of military exercises with India, partly in order to ensure the continuation of the relationship. Joint military industrial projects (Brahmos missile, fifth-generation fighter jets) are an even more important mechanism for continuing this relationship.

Russia does not generally seek exclusivity in its MSC relations. In other words, it does not work to prevent potential MSC partners from maintaining MSC relationships with other states such as the United States and its allies. It has no problem with Chinese and Indian participation in U.S.-led exercises such as RIMPAC, for example. Instead, it simply seeks to develop its own efforts, trusting that some cooperation is better than forcing partner states to choose and thereby losing out entirely.

For the United States, forcing countries that are not at the core of its alliance system to forgo security cooperation with Russia may be counterproductive. Countries such as India and Vietnam (not to mention China) would not be pleased to be forced to choose among their security partners. On the other hand, enhancing MSC with key allies is important in order to reassure them that the United States will provide assistance should they come under Russian threat in the future. The utility of MSC as a reassurance tool has been amply demonstrated in the European theater, particularly in the Baltic Sea region. It is similarly important in Southeast Asia, where the United States can play a critical role in countering Russian-supported Chinese efforts to cement its claims to disputed territories in the South China Sea. As Russia increasingly follows the Chinese line on these claims, the United States has an opportunity to enhance its security relations with countries on the other side, such as Vietnam and Indonesia.

Iran

By Michael Connell, CNA Adversary Analytics Program

Iran's destabilizing presence in the Gulf region and in the Levant has had a decisive impact on U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) maritime security cooperation (MCC), contributing to the intensity and duration of MSC-related activities as well as their focus. The capabilities of the GCC navies are relatively limited, at least when compared to their better trained and equipped Western allies. Thus, they depend heavily on the U.S./coalition naval presence in the Arabian Gulf to maintain regional security, as well as to deter Iranian adventurism and threats to regional sea lines of communication—viewed by most of the GCC states as the primary strategic threat in the maritime realm. The cornerstone of U.S.-GCC maritime security cooperation is

Coalition Task Force (CTF) 152, which was established in March 2004. CTF-152, one of three task forces operated by Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), operates primarily inside the Gulf. Its members include Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Italy, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Command of CTF 152 rotates between participatory nations on a three- to six-month basis. In addition to regional maritime security operations (MSO), CTF-152's responsibilities include coordinating MSC activities with regional partners.

Iran—inadvertently—was the driving force behind the creation of CTF-152. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia was already well entrenched by the time of the Tanker Wars in the 1980s. The end of the Iran-Iraq war did not diminish Tehran's hostile rhetoric toward the Gulf States, fostering the perception in Riyadh and several of the smaller Gulf states that Tehran's ultimate objective was to destabilize and overthrow the Gulf monarchies. Iran has invested heavily in its two naval arms: the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN). The often unpredictable and sometimes unprofessional behavior of Iran's naval forces—especially the IRGCN—has fostered the perception that Iran's naval forces constitute a threat to GCC sea lines of communication, which are particularly vulnerable to interdiction in the confined operating environment of the Gulf. GCC threat perceptions have been augmented by IRIN and IRGCN naval exercises and live-fire events in and around the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically significant maritime chokepoint.

As a result, a significant portion of U.S.-GCC MSC activities are geared specifically toward countering the threat posed by Iran's naval forces, even though the Gulf states will often publically deny a connection. The best example of this is the International Mine Countermeasures Exercise (IMCMEX), a serial-driven, NAVCENT/coalition-hosted exercise consisting of multiple mine countermeasures (MCM), maritime security operations (MSO), and maritime infrastructure protection (MIP) events. Cited as the largest multilateral exercise of its kind in the world, the last IMCMEX featured participants from more than 30 nations. Although the exercise has never officially named Iran as the focus of the exercise, the fact that Iran possesses the largest inventory of naval mines in the region, and that it is one of the few regional nations not invited to participate in the exercise, leads everyone—including the Iranians—to assume that IMCMEX is directed against them. Past iterations of the exercise have resulted in vehement denunciations from Tehran and occasional snap counter-exercises.

For their part, Iranian MSC activities in the Gulf region have been limited, both geographically—few countries are willing to engage with the Iranians militarily—and in terms of substance. Iranian vessels have periodically visited regional ports, including those in Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. They have also conducted maritime safety drills with their Omani counterparts. In recent years, the IRIN has made efforts to operate well beyond their littorals. IRIN task forces regularly conduct counterpiracy operations in the Horn of Africa region, citing the threat to their shipping and their role as a regional security provider, but they have not operated as part of a larger coalition. The IRIN has also conducted extended deployments that have included port visits as far away as Syria, Sri Lanka, and China.

U.S. Navy efforts to bolster the capacity of the GCC maritime security services have been stymied by several factors, especially the limited absorptive capacity of the latter. Most of the GCC navies are small coastal de-

fense forces, and as such, have only limited resources compared to their land and air counterparts. Nevertheless, MSC between the United States and its Gulf allies is likely to continue unabated, as long as the latter perceive Iran to be a threat and their primary competitor in the maritime realm.

North Korea

By Sarah Vogler and Chris Steinitz, CNA Adversary Analytics Program

A small, hermetic nation, North Korea poses a significant threat to its neighbors, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan, but impacts maritime security very little beyond the Korean Theater of Operations (KTO). Though it has considerable conventional military disadvantages, North Korea employs asymmetric capabilities, including submarines, to target ROK and U.S. interests and hold them at risk. The Korean Peoples' Navy (KPN) does not operate beyond its littorals, but North Korea's fleet of merchant ships operate globally and pose challenges for maritime and international security, primarily through their use of sea routes to proliferate weapons of mass destruction. Maritime security cooperation on law enforcement (i.e., Proliferation Security Initiative, or PSI) and on maritime intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) has contributed to addressing these challenges.

A local maritime threat

The KPN surface fleet is effectively a coastal protection force with no blue water capacity. The threats posed to U.S. and partner maritime forces by the KPN are its coastal defense structure, its mine-laying capabilities, and its submarine fleet, to include its Yono-class "mini-submarines." North Korea trains to use these submarines to defend its coastal waters, to target USN or ROKN ships, and to deliver special forces for amphibious assault. North Korea also has a large number of fast attack small craft to engage in swarm tactics and amphibious hovercraft for commando insertion. It has developed tactics to menace U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) naval forces in both peacetime and conflict.

Though North Korea has conducted provocations in the maritime domain in the past, Kim Jong-un demonstrates a preference for cyber and clandestine operations—which limit the potential for uncontrolled escalation—to achieve his objectives. Today, North Korea uses the maritime domain to advance its conventional military power, making considerable investments in its submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capability (the KN-11, or Pukkuksong-1) and its SINPO-class experimental ballistic missile submarine, the Gorae.

Security cooperation with ROK and Japanese maritime forces is a pillar of U.S. strategy to counter North Korea's ballistic missile capabilities, surface, and subsurface platforms. Developing a range of options for a regional response to low level and covert attacks by North Korea is necessary for dealing with the North's developing asymmetric strategy. Historical tensions between ROK and Japan often hamper efforts to build a unity to confront these threats, and MSC has played a role in forging openings in ROK-Japanese military relations.

Transregional WMD threat

North Korea's use of maritime routes to proliferate WMD has long been a concern for the international community and maritime security cooperation. The 2004 Proliferation Security Initiative targeted vessels suspected of transporting WMD materials to and from North Korea for interdiction. Following North Korea's second nuclear test in 2009, the United Nations passed Security Resolution 1874, which established expectations and obligations for all states regarding inspection of suspicious cargo bound to and from North Korea, effectively a total embargo.

Enforcement and maintaining robust maritime ISR remain challenges for efforts to interdict vessels suspected of transporting WMD. The success of initiatives such as PSI and the enforcement of UN resolutions are dependent on an ability to monitor and track vessels, and, within the parameters of maritime law enforcement, execute an interdiction. Additionally, North Korea's merchant vessels make extensive use of "flags of convenience," sailing under flags of countries that have lax requirements on safety, inspection, and insurance. Flags of convenience, limitations under the law of the sea and the use of force, and other loopholes allow North Korea to hide its activity and undermine efforts to shut down WMD proliferation.

PSI has been effective at countering the proliferation threat and should remain a focus, but open-source reporting suggests that inspection regimes need enhanced legal empowerment, interdiction training, and international cooperation. North Korea continues to abuse flags of convenience, and MSC can encourage third-party countries selling flags to North Korean merchant vessels to be good stewards of maritime safety and enhance their inspection regimes. Targeted MSC around the globe can also emphasize enhanced maritime ISR and information sharing to identify and track suspicious vessels and to close the loopholes that North Korea exploits.

Transnational threats

By Maria Kingsley, CNA Program on Transnational Challenges

Transnational security threats cover a wide array of issues ranging from illicit trafficking to epidemics. Illicit trafficking includes the trafficking of humans, weapons, weapons of mass destruction, drugs, and wildlife. Other types of transnational threats include terrorist networks; piracy and armed robbery at sea; criminal organizations; illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing; climate change; and epidemics. Frequently, the security gaps that allow transnational security threats to develop are the same gaps that violent extremist groups (VEOs) actively exploit. Transregional MSC to counter transnational threats is, therefore, a significant element in preventing the growth and expansion of VEOs.

Common elements of transnational issues

Despite the wide array of threats described above, transnational threats have several underlying elements in common:

- First, transnational networks often rely on illicit networks, which operate outside normal state legal frameworks. Some actors in these networks operate as part of illicit organizations such as terrorist

cells or criminal organizations. However, many illicit transnational actors also rely on official government or business representatives as part of the network to carry out their activities. As a result, corruption can be a major factor that allows illicit networks to thrive.

- Weak rule of law and governance within and among countries can provide space for these types of networks to operate and grow. Countries with weak institutional capacity to respond to threats are unable or, in some cases, unwilling to counter these types of threats.

- Transnational threats often exacerbate and/or thrive in areas with instability and/or social and economic issues. These systemic weaknesses can provide space for such actors to recruit, organize, or carry out operations.

Current maritime security responses to transnational threats

Security cooperation activities that focus on countering transnational threats fall into several categories:

- Multinational operational responses: This category includes multinational operational task forces convened to respond to specific threats such as drug trafficking or piracy. Examples include Joint Interagency Task Force – South (JIATF-S), which works to interdict illicit trafficking in the Caribbean; the Malacca Straits Patrols; and anti-piracy patrols in East Africa. These responses can be U.S. or regionally led, and they work to share information and coordinate multinational responses to common security issues.

- Security communities: Security cooperation activities can be used to help create or support security communities that focus on common regional security issues. Examples are the West African maritime security community which organizes around the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the ASEAN Regional Forum. These communities work to construct practical legal and cooperative operational mechanisms to address common security issues.

- Building partner capacity: A wide range of U.S.-led efforts focus on building security capabilities and capacities in partner nations, often through training and equipping. A few examples are Southeast Asia MSI, CBSI-TAFT, and CAMRI. In addition, the United States has begun to fund foreign security forces to train security forces in third countries—for example, through the U.S. Colombian Action Plan. Successfully building a sustainable capability or capacity in a partner nation often requires a long-term focus as well as political and institutional changes in the partner nation.

- Engagement missions: These activities focus on building relationships with local communities by providing humanitarian aid, medical services, or civil construction projects. Examples of these activities include the U.S. Navy's hospital ship deployments, such as Continuing Promise in Latin America and Pacific Partnership in Southeast Asia.

- Organizational responses: In a few cases, the U.S. military has also taken an organizational response to dealing with transnational threats. Currently, SOUTHCOM is working to implement a Counter Transnational and Transregional Threat Networks (CT3N) approach. This is a new concept which envisions SOUTHCOM acting as a coordination mechanism among other USG agencies involved in law

enforcement and countering transnational criminal networks. The concept involves a new organizational structure that will likely focus on information sharing among U.S. security and law enforcement agencies and partner nations. Implementation continues to be defined.

Implications for maritime security cooperation

All of the existing security cooperation activities described above can address transnational threats. However, more effective responses require tailoring these activities to the local drivers of transnational issues. To tailor these activities, maritime security cooperation should focus on addressing the following:

- Reinforcing state-citizen trust: Efforts to counter transnational threats should focus on building institutional capacity in the law enforcement and justice sectors in a way that encourages citizen trust in security institutions. Capacity building should focus on both domestic and cross-border law enforcement cooperation and anti-corruption programming. Building this type of capacity can require long-term advisors on the ground and will likely also require cooperation with other USG agencies.

- Building partner capabilities for intelligence, interagency information sharing, interdiction, and response: Responding to transnational networks requires the capacity to identify and respond to actors and activities that are part of the network. Building these capabilities in partner nations can help increase their own domestic capacity to respond to threats. This capacity building will likely require long-term investment, and sustaining these capabilities depends on partner nation institutional capacity.

- Encouraging regional cooperation to address common threats: Transnational networks often operate in multiple countries and international maritime space, and take advantage of weaknesses in cross-border coordination. Security cooperation should be used to create consensus on common threats as well as legal and operational mechanisms to counter transnational threats.

- Encouraging intelligence and information sharing among USG agencies and international partners: Building information-sharing networks within the USG and with international partners can help provide a common picture of illicit activities that can be used to counter network threats. Regional information fusion cells provide a means by which to encourage partners to share information.